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ABSTRACT

The history of ability grouping, especially since 1920, is reviewed and three recent surveys on its use are described. Current data was collected from school officials in all states concerning: the grade levels at which grouping is used; the length of time it has been used; the bases on which students are assigned to groups; the number of students involved; the percentage of these students from low socioeconomic backgrounds; the percentage of these students who are non-white; and what the respondee considers are the advantages and disadvantages of grouping. Teacher preferences are summarized. The data is reported in detail and the questionnaire employed is included. See TM 000 502-504 for descriptions of Parts 2-4 of the study. (PR)

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Ability Grouping: 1970

I. Common Practices in the Use of Tests for Grouping Students in Public Schools

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Center for Educational Improvement

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Athens, Georgia 30601

TM 000 501

FOREWORD

In December 1969, a task force was organized for the purpose of advising on the scope and organization of a series of reports regarding ability grouping in the public schools of the United States. Those involved in the planning included:

Warren G. Findley, Principal Investigator

Miriam M. Bryan	Edmund W. Gordon
Paul I. Clifford	Roger T. Lennon
John E. Dobbin	A. John Stauffer
Gordon Foster	Ralph W. Tyler

The Office of Education and the U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare were represented by Peter Briggs, Christopher Hagen, and Rosa D. Wiener.

Four documents were planned and have now been completed.

I. Common Practices in the Use of Tests for Grouping Students in Public Schools.

II. The Impact of Ability Grouping of School Achievement, Affective Development, Ethnic Separation, and Socio-economic Separation.

III. Problems and Utilities Involved in the Use of Tests for Grouping Children with Limited Backgrounds, and Alternative Strategies to Such Grouping.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

Mrs. Bryan prepared Document I, based on questionnaire responses from schoolmen and supplementary data from Miss Wiener. Dr. Clifford and Mr. Dominick Esposito prepared the basic content of Document II, which was then edited by Mrs. Bryan. Contributions to Document III were secured from Mrs. Bryan, Mr. Dobbin, Dr. Findley, Mrs. Blythe Mitchell, and Dr. Stauffer. The summary and conclusions were prepared by Dr. Findley.

The work presented herein was performed pursuant to a grant from the U. S. Office of Education, Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U. S. Office of Education, and no official endorsement by the U. S. Office of Education should be inferred.

Additional copies of the four documents are available upon request. Write:

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WHAT ARE COMMON PRACTICES IN THE USE OF TESTS FOR GROUPING STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS? *

Grouping in both elementary and secondary schools has been a topic of perennial interest in the United States for about a hundred years. The origins of grouping actually go further back than that--to the middle of the nineteenth century, when growing numbers of children in school began to result in change, first, from the ungraded one-room one-teacher school to the primary-intermediate or two-room two-teacher school and, finally, to graded many-room many-teacher schools with their consequent reduction in the range of differences in age and academic ability within each classroom.

The reduction of differences was, however, not great enough to prevent a high failure rate in single-grade classrooms, where emphasis now was being placed on the mastery of subject matter with steady progress from grade to grade. In the face of adverse reaction from both without and within the school to the retention of large numbers of older children in the elementary grades, educators began to look for ways of individualizing instruction so that school work could be completed at a different rate by each student.

A number of approaches to individualized instruction were developed and carried out between 1890 and 1910, and much research was built around them, but no conclusive evidence was ever obtained to show that they were particularly effective educationally. Teachers were overwhelmed by the problems that wide ranges of intellectual ability among students of the same age presented for a program of individualized instruction, and large numbers of students continued to fail the strictly subject-matter oriented courses of study.

Immediately following World War I, attention turned to the possibility of using group intelligence tests of the type developed during the war to measure learning ability and to form ability groups on the basis of test results. Scores on group intelligence tests and, a few years later, on standardized achievement tests became the measures on which were based most of the grouping practices between 1920 and 1935.

As a result of evidence offered by numerous research projects during this period, which failed to show that students grouped on the basis of scores on either intelligence or achievement tests were able to achieve greater subject-matter mastery than were students in heterogeneously grouped classrooms, and as a result, too, of the opposition of the proponents of progressive education to what they considered to be an undemocratic form of school organization that stigmatized slower students and made snobs out of the abler ones, ability grouping went into a period of relative decline.

From 1935 to 1950, the amount of ability grouping practiced was considerably less than that of the earlier 15-year period, and ability grouping was not a particularly popular topic for research. School people who continued to employ ability grouping because it was

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*Data assembled and summary prepared by Mrs. Miriam M. Bryan

administratively convenient and popular with teachers, and with some parents and students, had to admit that, despite efforts to improve their grouping procedures, students grouped on the basis of IQ or level of achievement still presented a wide range of differences in ability to learn generally and in ability to perform uniformly well or at the same speed in all subjects.

During the past 15 years, since the middle 1950's, there has been renewed interest in ability grouping--and a number of different patterns have emerged. For one thing, there is somewhat more concern today than formerly with special education for the gifted, with some impetus here undoubtedly the result of the launching of Sputnik and the consequent emphasis on special training for students with talents in mathematics, science and foreign languages; at the other end of the intellectual scale, children who present special problems of educability because of mental retardation, physical handicaps, or cultural deprivation have been given more special attention than previously. Some schools have gone still further and differentiated among high average, average, and low average students.

While relatively limited quantitative information has been available in recent years regarding grouping practices, at least three fairly thorough surveys have been reported:

The NEA Research Division in 1962 reported that during the school year 1958-59, 77.6 per cent of 3,418 school districts 2,500 and over in population were making some use of ability grouping in the elementary grades, and that 90.5 per cent of these districts were using it at the secondary school level. Of the districts reporting, 51.7 per cent said they planned to add or expand ability grouping in the elementary grades, and 67.3 per cent said they planned to add or expand it at the secondary school level. Fewer than 1 per cent indicated plans to curtail ability grouping.

During the 1960-61 school year a study of grouping in early elementary education was conducted by the U. S. Office of Education. Assignment of children to kindergarten classes on a homogeneous basis or on a partially homogeneous basis was reported by 6.6 per cent and 14.7 per cent, respectively, of the 5,559 districts responding, while 78.7 per cent of the districts reported heterogeneous grouping at this level. By the third grade, 15.8 per cent of 10,608 districts reported homogeneous grouping and 33.5 per cent partially homogeneous grouping, with 50.7 per cent of these districts still reporting a policy of heterogeneous grouping. Thus, the shift to homogeneous grouping was found to be well underway at the end of the primary level.

Data obtained from a questionnaire on administrative practices within the elementary school, distributed by the NEA Research Division to a sample of school systems in early 1966, showed 24.9 per cent of the 12,130 schools reporting to be assigning children to classes on a random basis, 43.2 per cent to be specially grouping a few children but not most, and 27.5 per cent carefully grouping all children, while 4.4 per cent gave no indication. The heaviest emphasis on the careful grouping of children was reported by school systems with enrollments of 100,000 or more (45.8 per cent).

It should be noted that the recent trend in the direction of the increased use of ability grouping has taken place in the face of newer and steadily increasing evidence from research study after research study that the various patterns of ability grouping tend to show little or no significant increase in achievement for children at any intellectual level and no little damage to the other aspects of the development of the children involved.

In an effort to get as much up-to-date information about grouping practices as could be gathered during the time available to the committee submitting this report, it was decided to solicit the help of state school officers, directors of research in large cities, and individuals known to be concerned with research studies involving children of minority or other disadvantaged groups. Letters were addressed to all 50 state school officers asking them to identify school systems within their states in which ability grouping has been or is being practiced and from which information concerning grouping procedures and the advantages and disadvantages of ability grouping to the system might be obtained. Approximately 400 such school systems were identified and each of these was asked to complete the brief questionnaire appended to this report and to supply other printed or written data describing how current grouping procedures have developed and how they work. Letters addressed to directors of research in 77 large cities, virtually all cities of over 200,000, asked that the same questionnaire be completed by them and that reports of any research undertaken in their cities in which ability grouping was involved be made available to the committee. Finally, letters were directed to 15 individuals in various parts of the country, known to have been involved in research having to do with school problems of children of Negro, Mexican-American, or American-Indian parents, or of white children in families of low socioeconomic status, who might have useful information for the committee.

Of the replies received from research directors in large cities, 10 were from the Northeast, 18 from the South, 13 from the Middle West, 6 from the Southwest, and 11 from the West--various regions being made up of the states assigned to these regions in the Coleman report on Equality of Educational Opportunity.* Of the replies received from school

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* Northeast--Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia.

South--Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, Louisiana, Arkansas.

Middle West--Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri.

Southwest--Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas.

West--Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, Hawaii.

administrators, 79 concerned schools or school districts in the Northeast, 47 in the South, 59 in the Middle West, 23 in the Southwest, and 62 in the West. Replies, then, have been received from 328 individuals in all.

It should be pointed out here that the data requested were for school districts, not for individual schools. Data were supplied for systems with school populations ranging from more than 1,000,000 to fewer than 100. Since virtually every large city and several county systems responded as units to the questionnaire, it seems safe to say that the number of schools represented is well beyond 5000.

Many local school officers supplemented the completed questionnaire with letters, pamphlets, and books describing in much more detail than was possible on the questionnaires the philosophy and practices of their districts with regard to grouping. Substantial printed documents are listed as supplementary references in the bibliography for this document. Of the school officers replying, only five wrote that the pressure of other activities would prevent their taking time to assemble the information necessary for completing the questionnaire.

The replies to the first seven questions on the questionnaire are summarized for the five regions and for the country as a whole. A second table for question 1, Table 1b, summarizes the incidence of ability grouping in terms of size of school district for the first 308 districts reporting.* The replies to questions 8 and 9 are summarized for four different groups of school districts: those employing grouping generally on a district basis; those employing grouping at some grade levels or in some subject matter areas; those in which grouping procedures and practices vary from school to school; and those not employing grouping either as a matter of district policy or on an individual school basis.

In interpreting the results of the questionnaire, three questions that might be asked of any individual making a self-report should be kept in mind:

1. Did the individual understand the questions asked?
2. Did the individual know himself (in this case his school or school district) sufficiently well to respond correctly?
3. Did the individual want to respond correctly?

There are reasons to believe that these questions cannot in all cases be answered in the affirmative. Certain questions were obviously misunderstood by some individuals completing the questionnaire. The nature of the response in other cases indicated that some individuals did not know their schools or school districts well enough to be able to supply the information requested. And the failure of some individuals to respond to certain questions may be interpreted as omission by design. Insofar as these conditions are present, a systematic error in information reported may exist. Entries in the tables indicating "Information Incomplete" reflect the extent of this defect quite accurately.

* Second tables for questions 6 and 7, numbered 6b and 7b, report the numbers of children represented in the school district totals reported in Tables 6a and 7a, respectively.

Question 1

Are students at any grade level in your school district grouped homogeneously?

If the individual completing the questionnaire answered question 1 with an unqualified "Yes" and indicated in response to question 2 that grouping was done in more than one subject or in more than one grade, the response was tallied as "Generally." Grouping for a single subject or for a single grade was tallied as "Partially."

As can be seen from Table 1a below, better than 55 per cent of the school districts from which replies were received do some grouping in more than one subject or grade on a district-wide basis and approximately 77 per cent do grouping of some kind. The percentages are not significantly different from those reported by the NEA Research Division in their 1962 summary.

Question 1

Are students at any grade level in your school district grouped homogeneously?

Table 1a: Responses by Geographical Location

	Northeast	South	Middle West	Southwest	West	Total
Generally	61	26	40	14	39	180
Partially	10	11	10	1	3	35
Varies with School	5	9	11	5	7	37
Generally No, Unclassifiable	0	1	0	2	2	5
No Grouping	12	18	9	7	20	66
Not Able to Respond	1	0	2	0	2	5
Total	89	65	72	29	73	328

Table 1b reports the use of grouping in terms of the size of the student population for 308 school districts. While the incidence of the grouping is slightly erratic, the tendency is in the direction of greater use of grouping in districts with larger school populations. The unusually large incidence of grouping shown in school districts with populations of less than 1,000 is largely the reflection of the wide use of ability grouping in small school districts in the Midwest, while the low incidence of grouping in the South and West influences the figures across the table.

Table 1b: Responses by Size of School District

	Less than 1000	1000-5000	5000-10000	10,000-25,000	25,000-50,000	50,000-100,000	100,000-500,000	More than 500,000	Total
Generally	15	41	33	39	16	17	8	2	171
Partially	6	10	7	9	1	1	1	0	35
Varies with School	0	3	2	4	8	9	6	1	33
Generally No, Unclassifiable	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	4
No Grouping	2	14	7	16	8	11	2	0	60
Not Able to Respond	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	5
	23	70	49	71	33	42	17	3	308

A minor trend is for school districts with populations under 25,000 to do more "partial" grouping within schools, while those over 25,000 more frequently allow variation from school to school.

The single subject for which grouping was reported most frequently was reading, with mathematics in second place. With or without ability grouping by class, a large number of respondents reported that grouping for reading and mathematics was done within classes.

Several respondents reporting vertical grouping, either within grade or within class, emphasized that the grouping was flexible--that students could move from level to level upon meeting the criteria for a particular level. Others pointed out that grouping, especially at the elementary school level, was done by basic skill areas and that a student might be assigned to groups at different levels in different skills. Still others called attention to the fact that, unless students are locked into a tracking system, grouping at the secondary school level may be largely a matter of self selection.

A considerable number of respondents indicated that homogeneously grouped classes had at some time recently been replaced by heterogeneously grouped classes, or were about to be, and that emphasis was being placed upon individualized instruction. Continuous progress concepts, computer-assisted instruction, team teaching, enrichment programs, and compensatory programs were mentioned as being employed with heterogeneous groups in the interest of better meeting the needs of the individual student.

Only two of the respondents now using heterogeneous grouping reported that their school districts were moving toward homogeneous grouping. One of these wrote:

> In the future we may have to consider grouping, especially in reading. As we move into the advanced stages of desegregation, it may be necessary to consider additional areas.

Question 2

If so, at what grade levels is homogeneous grouping done?

That practices regarding the grade levels at which homogeneous grouping is done vary widely is evident in the table on page 8, which shows the responses to question 2. As a matter of fact, even more variations were reported than are shown here, where only the grade levels at which homogeneous grouping is <u>mainly</u> done in any school district are indicated. Respondents reported different practices from school to school within district, different practices from grade to grade within school or district, and different practices for elementary, junior high, and senior high schools.

Of the 252 school districts reporting the use of such grouping on a systemwide basis, approximately 4 per cent indicated that this was begun at the kindergarten level, while another 23 per cent indicated that it was begun in grade 1. (The response "All" has been interpreted here as grades 1 through 12 rather than grades K through 12.) In the 252 schools approximately 29 per cent of the students had been grouped by the end of grade 3, 37 per cent in two grades or more by the end of grade 6, and 73 per cent in one or more grades by the end of grade 9. One hundred thirty-three, or 53 per cent, of the respondents reporting the use of ability grouping indicated that the grouping, whether begun in primary, intermediate, junior high school, or senior high school grades, continued through grade 12.

No one of the respondents reported assignment to different schools on the basis of grouping. All were concerned with grouping within school, within subject matter area, or within class.

Table 2

If so, at what grade levels is homogeneous grouping done?

	Northeast	South	Middle West	Southwest	West	Total
All	10	4	6	1	6	27
K-12	2	1	2	1	5	11
1-12	6	4	2	0	0	12
1-3	0	0	2	1	2	5
1-4	0	0	0	0	2	2
1-6	2	0	1	0	0	3
1-8	3	3	1	1	0	8
1-10	0	0	1	0	1	2
3-12	2	0	0	0	0	2
4-6	0	1	2	0	2	5
4-9	0	1	1	0	1	3
4-12	1	4	1	0	0	6
5-8	1	1	0	0	0	2
5-9	2	0	0	0	0	2
5-12	1	0	1	0	0	2
7-8	6	0	3	0	0	9
7-9	6	0	2	1	4	13
7-12	15	8	5	5	8	41
8-12	2	0	8	0	1	11
9-12	4	3	3	4	4	18
10-12	2	0	1	0	0	3
Varies with School	5	9	11	5	7	37
Other	6	5	6	0	6	23
Information Incomplete*	0	3	2	3	2	10
No Grouping	12	18	9	7	20	66
Not Able to Respond	1	0	2	0	2	5
Total	89	65	72	29	73	328

* Includes 5 whose response to question 1 was recorded "Generally No, Unclassifiable".

Question 3

How long has homogeneous grouping been practiced in your district?

The information given in response to question 3, summarized in the table below, is interesting because it reflects the uneven history of grouping. Fifty-one respondents, or 20 per cent, indicated that homogeneous grouping had been practiced in their districts for thirty years or more, placing the introduction at some time during the years of early popularity of this kind of school organization. One respondent reported that homogeneous grouping had been practiced in his district since 1890, when such grouping was little more than an idea. Thirty four respondents, or 13 per cent, reported the introduction of homogeneous grouping between 1940 and 1954, a period when grouping was at the nadir of its popularity. But 143 respondents, or 57 per cent, reported its introduction during the past 15 years, when it has enjoyed a period of increasing support by administrators and teachers in spite of the lack of conclusive evidence regarding its effectiveness in the improvement of learning.

Several respondents reported that grouping had been practiced in their districts for many years but in varying and continually changing ways to conform with new developments in educational theory and practice. Some indicated that the introduction of the ungraded primary school in recent years had been responsible for their currently grouping in the early grades; others reported that grouping had been recently introduced with the development of special programs for the academically talented and the mentally retarded.

Table 3

How long has homogeneous grouping been practiced in your district?

Number of Years	Northeast	South	Middle West	Southwest	West	Total
1-5	10	8	14	3	7	42
6-10	13	12	19	3	14	61
11-15	13	8	5	6	8	40
16-20	10	2	2	3	4	21
21-30	4	2	5	2	0	13
30+	3	3	3	3	3	15
Many	11	4	7	0	6	28
Always	3	0	0	0	4	7
Varies with School	0	1	0	0	0	1
Information Incomplete*	9	7	6	2	5	29
No Grouping	12	18	9	7	20	66
Not Able to Respond	1	0	2	0	2	5
	89	65	72	29	73	328

*Includes 5 whose response to question 1 was recorded "Generally No, Unclassifiable".

Question 4

On what basis are your students assigned to homogeneous grouping? (If on the basis of test scores, please name the test.)

The information provided in response to question 4 leaves little doubt that test scores play a major role in group assignments, whether by themselves or in combination with other criteria. As is shown in the table below 206 of the 252 school districts reporting the use of homogeneous grouping, or approximately 82 per cent of these districts, use test scores as the basis, or as one of the bases, for group assignments.

Table 4

On what basis are your students assigned to homogeneous grouping?

	Northeast	South	Middle West	Southwest	West	Total
Test Scores Only	7	7	9	2	8	33
Test Scores and School Grades	9	3	4	3	3	22
~~Teacher~~ Test Scores and Teacher, Counselor, and/or Principal Judgment	18	13	16	5	17	69
Test Scores, School Grades, and Teacher Judgment	8	3	5	2	1	19
School Grades, Teacher Judgment, and Student Interest	1	1	7	2	3	14
Many Criteria (Test Scores, Teacher Judgment, Grade Averages) Plus Student and/or Parent Desire	23	12	16	5	5	61
Miscellaneous Single Criteria	10	4	3	1	8	26
No Specific Criteria--Varies with Local Practice	1	1	1	0	3	6
Information Incomplete *	0	2	0	2	3	7
No Grouping	12	18	9	7	20	66
Not Able to Respond	0	1	2	0	2	5
Total	89	65	72	29	73	328

*Includes 5 whose response to question 1 was recorded "Generally No, Unclassifiable".

The information provided in the table must be interpreted with considerable caution since the question did not require school districts to report how highly structured were the procedures for assigning students to groups or when multiple criteria were given as the basis for making group assignments, how the different criteria were weighted. Some respondents did, however, provide detailed information about their grouping procedures and others indicated the order of importance given the different criteria in reaching decisions regarding group assignments.

An examination of the information provided indicates that in some school districts grouping is done according to a highly structured, district-wide plan that varies only from elementary to junior to senior high school. In other districts the procedures vary from school to school with the local faculties responsible for determining them. Several districts with highly structured procedures for grouping describe these in detail in printed booklets available to teachers, parents, and other interested persons.

If one can assume that multiple criteria listed by the respondents were given in the order of the relative weights assigned them, then test scores, school grades, and teacher judgment are generally considered to be the most important criteria, with approximately equal numbers of districts placing each of these at the top of the lists provided. Most respondents who did indicate an order of importance for different criteria reported that group assignments were made chiefly on the basis of teacher judgment and past performance, with test scores used principally to substantiate teacher judgment. A single, large city in the Northeast reported that group assignments were the responsibility of the school principal, the only directive from the central office being "that students are not to be grouped on the basis of a single test score alone."

More than 50 different standardized tests were identified by the respondents as being used in their districts. Ranking highest among these in terms of use are the following:

Readiness--Metropolitan Readiness Test

Achievement--California Achievement Test, Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, Iowa Tests of Educational Development, Metropolitan Achievement Test, Stanford Achievement Test

Aptitude--Differential Aptitude Tests

Intelligence--Lorge-Thorndike Intelligence Test, Otis-Lennon Test of Mental Ability

These and some of the other widely used tests are given special attention in the third document, in which the problems and utilities of tests used for grouping are treated.

Question 5

How many students in all are involved in your homogeneous grouping plan?

As indicated in the table below, useful information was obtained from 207 of the school districts in which homogeneous grouping is practiced. More than 30 respondents reporting district-wide grouping or the per cent of students involved in grouping did not give school enrollment figures for the district; 28 respondents replied that the number of students involved in their grouping plan was not known; and 9 respondents chose not to answer the question at all. The assistance of the U.S. Office of Education was solicited in obtaining total enrollment figures for all districts involved. Combining this information with the figures supplied by respondents made it possible to reduce the number of responses that could not be used to 45.

Table 5

How many students are involved in your homogeneous grouping plan?

	Northeast	South	Middle West	Southwest	West	Total
Less than 2,500*	31	10	24	7	25	97
2,500-5,000	15	7	9	5	8	44
5,000-10,000	9	4	5	2	2	22
10,000-25,000	6	9	3	2	4	24
25,000-75,000	1	2	3	1	0	7
75,000-125,000	2	2	0	0	0	4
125,000-200,000	4	1	0	0	0	5
More than 200,000**	1	0	1	0	2	4
Information Incomplete***	7	12	16	5	10	50
No Grouping	12	18	9	7	20	66
Not Able to Respond	1	0	2	0	2	5
Total Number of Districts	89	65	72	29	73	328
Total Number of Students Involved	1,850,240+	541,272+	575,883+	102,105+	793,634+	3,863,134+

* Several school districts reported grouping in a single subject or at a single grade level.

** Two large city school systems reported grouping for 750,000 and 553,338 students, respectively.

*** Student populations of these school districts were known, but not the number of students involved in homogeneous grouping. Includes 5 whose response to question 1 was recorded "Generally No, Unclassifiable".

It is interesting to note that while 67 districts with school populations of 25,000 or over reported that homogeneous grouping, generally or partially, was practiced in their districts as a matter of district policy (see Table 1b), only 20 of these districts reported the involvement of 25,000 or more students in their grouping plan. This is to a large extent the result of grouping at selected grade levels rather than at all grade levels. That practices vary widely in this regard was noted earlier.

Question 6

What per cent of these students are from low socioeconomic backgrounds?

The responses to this question, summarized in the table below, were disappointing. Sixty-nine of the 252 school districts reporting grouping either indicated that there was no information available regarding the number of students of low socioeconomic background involved in grouping in their districts or failed to respond to the question. Since the question

Table 6a

What per cent of these students are from low socioeconomic backgrounds?

	Northeast	South	Middle West	Southwest	West	Total
Less than 10%	20	6	13	2	11	52
10-25%	28	10	17	5	14	74
26-50%	11	14	8	7	4	44
51-75%	3	4	1	0	2*	10
More than 75%	1	0	2**	0	0	3
Information Incomplete ***	13	13	20	8	20	74
No Grouping	12	18	9	7	20	66
Not Able to Respond	1	0	2	0	2	5
Total Number of Districts	89	65	72	29	73	328
Total Number of Students Involved	682,305	84,002	80,152	14,354	15,063+	875,876+

* The number of students involved in grouping was not reported.

** One school reported that 100 per cent of its students moving from kindergarten to first grade were grouped but only a single class was involved.

*** Includes 5 whose response to question 1 was recorded "Generally No, Unclassifiable".

was purposely asked in such a way that respondents to the questionnaire would not need to reveal information about the per cent of students assigned to different groups who were of low SES, it is hard to believe that the high degree of unresponsiveness was by design. Still, approximate per cents of low SES students involved in grouping should have been fairly easy to figure.

Table 6b, below, gives the approximate numbers of students involved in each of the categories reported by district in Table 6a.

Table 6b

Numbers of Students in Socioeconomic Categories Shown in Table 6a.

	Northeast	South	Middle West	Southwest	West	Total
Less than 10%	1,624	11,130	1,085	165	2,470	16,474
10-25%	43,698	20,978	6,867	2,637	8,642	82,822
26-50%	8,001	35,894	11,400	11,552	3,951	70,798
51-75%	508,482	16,000	10,800	000	?	535,282+
More than 75%	120,500	000	50,000	000	000	170,000
Total Number of Students Involved	682,305	84,002	80,152	14,354	15,063+	875,876+

Question 7

What per cent of these students are non-white?

For this question, too, the responses were disappointing. As shown in the table on page 15, 56 of the 252 school districts reporting homogeneous grouping either indicated that information was not available concerning the racial composition of students involved in grouping in their district or failed to answer this question. Again, the question was purposely asked in such a way that respondents to the questionnaire would not need to reveal information about the per cent of non-white students assigned to different groups. However, 22 per cent of the respondents could not or would not answer the question as presented.

One observation is of special interest here. Forty-nine per cent of the school districts in the Northeast and in the Middle West practicing ability grouping reported that fewer than 10 per cent of the students involved were non-white; 29 of the 35 districts in the Middle West so reporting indicated that the per cent of non-white students involved was less than one per cent or zero. Many of the districts reporting low per cents of non-whites in their grouping plans, particularly smaller districts in New England

and in the Plains States, reported total non-white populations of less than one per cent or zero by way of explanation of the absence of non-whites in their school populations and, hence, in their grouping plans.

Table 7a

What per cent of these students are non-white?

	Northeast	South	Middle West	Southwest	West	Total
Less than 10%	44	8	35	6	28	121
10-25%	11	16	7	7	3	44
26-50%	3	8	1	1	5	18
51-75%	4	5	0	1	2	12
More than 75%	0	0	1	0	0	1
Information Incomplete*	14	10	17	7	13	61
No Grouping	12	18	9	7	20	66
Not Able to Respond	1	0	2	0	2	5
Total Number of Districts	89	65	72	29	73	328

* Includes 5 whose response to question 1 was recorded "Generally No, Unclassifiable".

Table 7b, below, gives the approximate numbers of students involved in each of the categories reported by district in Table 7a, above.

Table 7b

	Northeast	South	Middle West	Southwest	West	Total
Less than 10%	3,939	8,240	1,511	883	2,159	16,732
10-25%	6,288	35,600	7,650	4,442	414	54,394
26-50%	5,891	15,474	8,000	6,000	20,600	55,965
51-75%	545,842	3,793	000	150	25,000	574,785
More than 75%	000	000	287,736	000	000	287,736
Total Number of Students Involved	561,960	63,107	304,897	11,475	48,173	989,612

Question 8

What do you consider to be the advantages of homogeneous grouping in your school district?

As indicated earlier, the responses to this question and to question 9 are grouped according to the extent to which the school districts responding are currently practicing homogeneous grouping. For each group the responses are listed in order of the frequency with which they were mentioned by respondents.

It was expected originally that there might be wide differences in the nature of the responses given by the various groups since the questions asked specifically for "the advantages (and the disadvantages) of homogeneous grouping in your school district." Actually, the advantages and disadvantages listed for the different groups are very similar, except that the number of advantages and disadvantages bears a direct relationship to the extent to which homogeneous grouping is practiced.

<u>Districts employing homogeneous grouping generally</u> (180)

Improves attention to individual needs (45)

Permits students to progress at their own learning rate (36)

Allows the student to compete on a more equitable basis (33)

Reduces ability and achievement range within the classroom (25)

Facilitates curriculum planning (23)

Permits both remedial and enrichment programs (21)

Results in better teaching and more effective learning (18)

Makes it possible for each student to achieve success (18)

Permits the more effective selection and use of materials (17)

Makes instruction easier (13)

Reduces student frustration and dropout rate (10)

Is preferred by the teachers (8)

Improves teacher and student morale (6)

Encourages better use of teacher preparation time (5)

Permits more effective classroom planning (5)

Makes possible the development of advanced courses, sometimes with state aid, for the academically talented (5)

Offers no obvious advantages (4)

Reduces concentration on teaching average group (3)

Facilitates scheduling (3)

Improves the student's self-image (3)

Facilitates motivation (3)

Is liked by parents of more talented students (2)

Districts employing homogeneous grouping at some grade levels or in some subjects (35)

Makes it easier to adjust the curriculum to different needs and abilities (21)

Makes possible more economic and more effective use of materials and media (13)

Offers no obvious advantages (13)

Permits individual student to move at his own rate (10)

Offers every student an opportunity to achieve some success in school and to enjoy its attendant benefits--enhanced self-concepts, increased satisfaction with school, improved motivation to learn, and more rapid progress in learning (7)

Results in more effective teaching with fewer demands on the teacher (6)

Results in improved teacher morale (6)

Results in more time devoted to slow learners and consequent greater student involvement (4)

Simplifies scheduling procedures for the administrator (3)

Reduces teaching for the "middle" group (3)

Makes it possible to present esoteric concepts in accelerated classes that could not be presented in heterogeneous classes (3)

Decreases discipline problems and number of dropouts (2)

Permits students to move at their own rates in the basic skill areas at the same time allowing them the advantages of heterogeneous grouping in other subject areas (2)

Districts in which policies regarding homogeneous grouping vary from school to school (37)

Enables the teacher to work within the framework of one major lesson plan which can accommodate for student individual differences rather than many specific, diversified plans which may lead to teacher confusion and classroom chaos (13)

Permits more attention to individual student interests and problems (9)

Allows for enrichment, faster movement, and early graduation for the academically talented (7)

Permits the more efficient purchase and use of materials (3)

Makes it easier to stimulate motivation and, consequently, to improve class achievement (3)

Permits more attention to slow learners (3)

Motivates students to make better progress when in class of peers (2)

Provides better climate for instruction (2)

Reduces failure and retention (2)

Offers social advantages such as peer acceptance (1)

Reduces teaching for the "middle" group (1)

Improves administrative management (1)

Districts in which there is little or no grouping (71)

May offer better learning opportunities for students of other than average ability (6)

Pleases teachers who prefer this kind of organization (4)

Permits more concentration on needs of the individual student (2)

Improves the student's sense of accomplishment (2)

May be advantageous if groupings are flexible ones set up for specific purposes (2)

Permits better use of teaching aids (1)

Offers no obvious advantages (1)

Question 9

What do you consider to be the disadvantages of homogeneous grouping in your school district?

Districts employing homogeneous grouping generally (180)

Reduces or eliminates leadership and stimulation provided by heterogeneous grouping (37)

Stifles the socialization process, giving rise to snobbery in some cases and second class citizenry in others (30)

Fosters unhealthy self-concepts, especially among slow learners (24)

Results in labeling and stigma for slow learners (18)

Encourages some teachers to work under the misconception that since the class has been grouped according to ability, all students within that class are the same (17)

Destroys the spectrum of types with whom an individual functions in a real life situation (16)

Has no obvious disadvantages (15)

May result in separation of students by race and socioeconomic status (13)

Reduces attention to individual problems (12)

May create administrative problems, like arranging schedules (11)

Does not necessarily result in better learning (9)

Creates problems of parental understanding of potential of students at all levels (8)

Creates morale problems for teachers assigned to low groups (8)

Results sometimes in putting too many discipline problems together (5)

Is frequently based on invalid criteria (5)

Results in the formation of cliques (4)

Destroys the challenge of competition (4)

May lead to mediocrity in education (4)

Results in lowest level students getting least experienced teachers (4)

Denies enrichment programs for the brighter student (3)

Tends to "lock" slower learners (3)

Creates problems of student placement (3)

Results in inappropriate use of materials (2)

Creates social pressures (2)

Reduces flexibility (2)

Encourages dropouts (1)

Results in competition rather than cooperation (1)

Prevents bright students from becoming sensitive to problems of slow learners (1)

<u>Districts employing homogeneous grouping at some grade levels or in some subject areas</u> (35)

Tends to create a built-in expectancy for students to function at whatever level they are placed (16)

Denies the average and slow learner the stimulation of the more capable learner (12)

Provides a poor social-cultural mix (10)

Allows students little opportunity for movement throughout school years as a result of initial labeling (9)

Has no obvious disadvantages (8)

Results in parental objections on the basis of possible stigma (7)

Does not provide for individual needs (6)

Creates problems of leadership for the slower learner (6)

Tends to promote the idea of an intellectual elite, which is more status conscious and less tolerant (4)

Results in decreased motivation at all levels (3)

Damages the student's self-concept (3)

Results in assignment of reluctant teachers to slower classes (3)

Requires more effort to organize and schedule (2)

Is frequently based on invalid criteria (2)

Puts more discipline problems together (2)

Does not allow flexible grouping patterns in classroom (1)

Creates a situation that is not true to life (1)

Sometimes results in parental pressure for assignment to classes too advanced for the student (1)

Districts in which policy regarding grouping varies from school to school (37)

Creates a blighted teaching situation for the teachers of the slow groups (6)

Is likely to result in labeling and stigma (4)

Encourages tendency to ignore individual needs and consider all students alike (4)

Reduces opportunities for brighter students to stimulate the slower ones and for brighter students to get ego enhancement from comparison with slower ones (4)

Creates problems of scheduling in the secondary school (3)

May set false standard that becomes self-fulfilled for some (3)

Tends to segregate students by race and socioeconomic status (2)

Creates a situation that is not true to real life (2)

Does not provide a good social mix (2)

Does not inspire slower students (2)

Results in feelings of inferiority (2)

Does not adequately distribute leadership of students (1)

May result in development of cliques (1)

May result in lack of understanding of slower students by faster ones (1)

Creates too much feeling of self-importance in higher groups (1)

Tends to be too structured and rigid (1)

Causes difficulties because of wide age range (1)

Concentrates discipline problems (1)

Has no obvious disadvantages (1)

Districts in which there is little or no grouping (71)

Results in labeling, thus creating poor self-image for the slow and disadvantaged (10)

Reduces teacher and student enthusiasm and motivation (10)

Implies that class membership is determined by a constant set of factors with result that students, once grouped, will remain in those groups for a complete program (5)

Denies students the advantages of associating with others of different levels and abilities (5)

Tends to group students who are slow in one subject matter area in slow groups in all areas (4)

Denies slow students the leadership provided by higher groups (4)

Offers the slow learner little stimulation to succeed (3)

Results in segregation--racial, social, economic (3)

Has not been shown to improve learning--and may impede progress as the student progresses to higher grades (3)

Concentrates problems--both disciplinary and learning (2)

Impractical in schools with small enrollments or geographic problems (2)

Fosters antisocial attitudes that are not offset by any resulting gain from homogeneous grouping (2)

Limits class contact of talented students to other talented students, with consequent clashes of temper (1)

Creates a separation that is contrary to that of the world in which the child must function (1)

As indicated earlier, only two of the school districts responding reported that they are moving from heterogeneous toward homogeneous grouping. A number of districts, however, reported that while they are currently practicing homogeneous grouping to a considerable extent, the thrust is in the direction of heterogeneous grouping. A few comments from these districts follow.

In response to question 8 on the advantages of homogeneous grouping:

> The major advantage to homogeneous grouping is the cutting down of the ability range so that the teacher can more effectively reach all students.
>
> At one time it was felt that by narrowing the achievement span, teachers could plan for more effective instructional experiences and that the learning patterns of students could be more scientifically utilized. Present emphasis upon individualized instruction is rapidly rendering this kind of thinking obsolescent in our district.
>
> Since our concept of grouping is one of ability grouping within subject matter, we believe the advantages are obvious. We think you should know, however, that in some subject areas we deliberately have heterogeneous grouping.

In response to question 9 on the disadvantages of homogeneous grouping:

> One disadvantage of homogeneous grouping is the step-ladder effect. In large schools with 20 to 25 sections to a grade, the achievement and ability levels of groups can become so unproductive that both teachers and students are constantly frustrated. Neither teachers nor students have the experiential background to cope with problems that arise.
>
> There are many effective arguments for strictly heterogeneous grouping and we are coming to this more and more.

The responses to question 8, generally, indicate that despite the fact that research on homogeneous grouping has failed to show that this practice results in significant increments in learning, school districts employing it can see advantages in their own situations and that even those districts not employing it can, nevertheless, name some advantages. The responses to question 9 show that districts employing homogeneous grouping are about as well aware of its disadvantages, either generally or in their own districts, as are those districts not employing it. In the face of the conflicting evidence offered by research and with the disadvantages that are obvious to the districts themselves, why does the practice of homogeneous grouping persist to the extent that it does?

One reason why homogeneous grouping is practiced widely is undoubtedly teacher preference for it. In a poll conducted by the NEA in 1961, a nationwide sample of public school teachers was asked the following question:

> Considering all the advantages and disadvantages of ability grouping according to IQ or achievement scores, do you favor such grouping into separate classes...?

Here are the answers received.

	Elementary	Secondary
Approve	57.6%	87.3%
Disapprove	33.1%	8.6%
Don't Know	9.3%	4.1%

Opinions were analyzed according to whether the teachers had or had not taught in schools with ability grouping. Elementary teachers who had taught under both arrangements were two to one in favor of ability grouping; and better than 90 per cent of the secondary teachers who had taught under both arrangements were in favor of ability grouping.

In 1968 the NEA conducted a second poll on ability grouping. A scientifically selected sample of the nation's public school teachers were asked this question:

> What types of pupils would you prefer to teach, so far as ability is concerned?

Four types of groups were listed: high, average, low or mixed. In addition, respondents were allowed to indicate no preference. The results are shown below.

	Elementary	Secondary	Total
High	18.4%	34.6%	26.0%
Average	44.7%	38.9%	42.1%
Low	4.3%	1.9%	3.1%
Mixed	21.3%	15.2%	18.4%
No Preference	11.3%	9.4%	10.4%

It is interesting to note that more teachers prefer to teach classes of average ability than classes of any other type. And, as one might expect, with an overwhelming number of teachers expressing preferences, only 3 per cent prefer to teach classes of low ability. As to grade levels, the elementary teachers choose mixed and high groups only half as often as average groups, with a slight preference for mixed over high groups. The secondary school teachers prefer high groups almost as much as average groups, while mixed groups run a poor third.

The information assembled by the committee permits generalizations beyond responses to the question which serves as the title of this document.

Briefly, if the school districts sampled are in any way representative, it may be said on the basis of responses to the questionnaire that

(1) Ability grouping is being practiced in some form in approximately 77 per cent of the nation's public schools.

(2) There is proportionately more grouping in the Northeast and the Middle West than in other parts of the country.

(3) Slightly more than 20 per cent of the schools use grouping at all grade levels, with more grouping being done at the secondary school level than at the elementary school level.

(4) Approximately 22 per cent of the schools practicing grouping have been doing this for 16 years or more.

(5) Tests are used by about 82 per cent of the schools that practice grouping, but only about 13 per cent among these rely on test scores alone; rather, they use them as one of two or more criteria for grouping.

(6) The larger the school district, the more likely it is that grouping will be practiced on a systemwide basis.

(7) About 23 per cent of the students involved in grouping are "known" to be from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

(8) About 26 per cent of the students involved in grouping are nonwhite.

(9) In school districts where grouping is employed, it is favored more often than not because it is seen as a convenient way to provide for individual differences and because it makes teaching easier and facilitates curriculum planning.

(10) In school districts where grouping is not employed, it is seen as likely to result in the labeling of students too early in their school careers, to limit the possibilities of movement of students with maturation, and to reduce both teacher and student motivation.

It must be emphasized that the failure of many school districts to respond to certain questions in the questionnaire may have implications for the study and render some of these generalizations erroneous.

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QUESTIONNAIRE
ON
SCHOOL GROUPING PRACTICES

1. Are students at any grade level in your school district grouped homogeneously?

2. If so, at what grade levels is homogeneous grouping done?

3. How long has homogeneous grouping been practiced in your district?

4. On what basis are your students assigned to homogeneous grouping? (If on the basis of test scores, please name the test.)

5. How many students in all are involved in your homogeneous grouping plan?

6. What per cent of these students are from low socioeconomic background?

7. What per cent of these students are non-white?

8. What do you consider to be the advantages of homogeneous grouping in your district?

9. What, if any, do you consider to be the disadvantages of homogeneous grouping in your school district?